

STATE GOVERNMENTS REPUBLICAN IN FORM.

SPEECH

OF

HON. THADDEUS STEVENS,

OF PENNSYLVANIA,

DELIVERED

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STATE GOVERNMENTS REFORMATION IN FORM

REVENUE

HOW THE REVENUE SYSTEM

OF THE STATE

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IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

REPORT OF THE

COMMISSIONERS OF THE REVENUE

1881

SPEECH.

The House, having under consideration the motion of Mr. BROOMALL, of Pennsylvania, to reconsider the vote by which the bill to guarantee to the several States of the Union a republican form of government had been referred to the Committee on the Judiciary—

Mr. STEVENS said :

Mr. SPEAKER: This, Mr. Speaker, is a grave question of argument; it is not a question for demagogues. The world is going on in its progress of human government, and is every day advancing in the great science which is to make man happy or make him miserable. We are either to relapse into a state of barbarism—where that infamous doctrine that one man can own another is to be re-established, or we are to establish the doctrine that every man governs himself and has rights which are inalienable. Among those inalienable rights, I start by saying, is the right of universal suffrage, which no man will dare, after this generation shall have passed away, to dispute. We are not now merely expounding a government; we are building one. We are making a nation. We are correcting the injustice, the errors, the follies which were heaped upon other times by necessity. From the dark ages up, mankind have been ground down by despots and by tyrants whom they could not in any way control. They were unable to form governments such as ought to control the human race and enable us to govern ourselves. Europe, Asia—every country in the world till within the last century, has been thus held in chains which it could not break—in chains and withes which the world could not snap in its then condition. But a period arrived when the Almighty Governor of the universe placed within the power of our fathers both the knowledge and finally the power to break those chains and give the world an opportunity, if it would, to be free. When the dawn of the Revolution came, it broke upon this world as a new, a mighty, a glorious revelation. That which never before had opened the eyes of mankind and given them a clear insight into the rights of the human race, opened the eyes of our great and glorious fathers, and taught them precisely what we have to carry out; and when we have carried it out, human government will become perfect, tyrants everywhere must tremble, and demagogues, who talk to us about difference of races, must be ashamed and skulk from the face of the world.

Now, what was that great right that they discovered? It was that "all men are born equal." The black man who brushes the boots of my respected friend from Luzerne district [Mr. WOODWARD] is, according to that doctrine, as much entitled to every right and every privilege of a free man and a citizen as that gentleman or myself. And, whenever he or I or any one else undertakes to make a distinction between the black race and our own because of the color of the skin or the formation of the body, he forgets his God, and his God will forget him.

In other words, we now propose to go to universal and impartial suffrage, as the only foundation upon which the Government can stand. You must build all your science of government upon that foundation. When you attempt to depart from it you cease to be men and become tyrants, deserving the execration of the human race. There is no other way than that of universal suffrage by which you and I and every man can protect ourselves against the injustice and inhumanity and wrongs that would otherwise be inflicted upon us.

We have reached a point in the history of this nation when we can adopt that great and glorious principle. We have just builded a nation in whose institutions we can incorporate that principle. And my effort shall be to prove to this House, not simply that we have just reached that point, but that we have reached it by means of the Constitution—not by violating it, although our forefathers, who proclaimed that principle and would have adopted it, could not do so without violating the compact which they themselves had made, and which would have destroyed the great Government they were then building and were bound to defend. We have, I say, reached that period which our fathers did not and could not reach, when, in speaking of universal suffrage, we must speak of it not as

a boon, but as an inalienable right, which no man dare take away, and which no man can rightfully surrender. His God has forbidden it. The science of government has forbidden it.

Henceforth let us understand that universal suffrage operating in favor of every man who is to be governed by the votes cast, is one of those doctrines planted deep as the foundations upon which our fathers laid the immortal work of universal liberty, which work of theirs will last just so long as that immortal doctrine shall last, and no longer.

Whatever construction shall be given to the Constitution in its present condition by this Congress and those nearest the great events which have modified it, will be likely to be accepted through future time as its true meaning. It is important, therefore, that the most beneficent interpretation should be given to it, and that it should be most liberally construed, so as to secure all human rights in the changed condition of our country and of that instrument which, while it, as to the old States, may not be radically changed, is not so inflexible as to be incapable of accommodating itself to the changing necessities of humanity.

Before the Constitution was amended, I could not agree with some of my learned friends that Congress could intermeddle with State laws relative to the elective franchise in the United States. The circumstance of slavery seemed, while it was submitted to, to prevent it. After the amendment abolishing slavery, I still doubted and proposed a constitutional remedy on the 5th of December, 1865, in the following words:

"All national laws shall be equally applicable to every citizen, and no discrimination shall be made on account of race and color."

Since the adoption of the fourteenth amendment, however, I have no doubt of our full power to regulate the elective franchise, so far as it regards the whole nation, in every State of the Union, which I hope will be so arranged as to be beneficial to the nation, just to every citizen, and carry out the great designs of the framers of the Government, according to their views expressed in the Declaration of Independence.

This cannot fail to be beneficial and convenient, when we consider the trouble and inconvenience which a citizen of one State encounters when he travels temporarily into another. Instead of being a brother at home he is now an alien in his native land. While he participates in all the burdens and anxieties of Government, he is forbidden, if a non-resident, to take part in selecting the magistrate who is to rule his destinies for the next four years. In this there is no principle of republican justice.

The Constitution of 1789 did not carry out the principles of government which were intended by the fathers when, in 1776, they laid the foundations of the Government on which this nation was built. Then they had been inspired with such a light from on High as never man was inspired with before, in the great work of providing freedom for the human race through a government in which no oppression could find a resting-place. They contemplated the erection of a vast empire over the whole continent which, in its national character, should be governed by laws of a supreme, unvarying character. While municipal institutions with self-control might be granted for convenience, it was never intended that one-half of this nation should be governed by one set of laws and the other half by another and conflicting set on the same subject.

The laws, the principles, which were to apply to the dwellers on the Penobscot were to apply to those on the Savannah and Susquehanna; else the Declaration would have proclaimed that the one—the people on the Penobscot or Susquehanna—were born free and equal, and those on the Savannah with a modified equality; that the one had inalienable rights, among which was liberty; that the other had inalienable rights, but perfect liberty was not among them. The grand idea of those immortal men was, that there were certain rights, privileges and immunities, which belong to every being who had an immortal soul, none of which should be taken from him, nor could he surrender them in any arrangement with society. So essential to the repose of the whole community was it that every man should possess each of these rights, privileges, and immunities, that he was forbidden by his Creator to part with them. He could not sell himself, he could not sell his children, into slavery. He could not sell his life for a price. He could not surrender the right to pursue his own happiness. Every attempt to do so was nugatory. Every instrument founded upon such a contract, no matter how solemn, no matter how hedged about by broad seals, no matter how stamped by State legislation and executive approval—none of these things gave it life. It was null and void; it was a corpse incapable of animation.

I am speaking now of the original design of the framers of the Declaration of Independence, who had determined that there were certain principles which, to give perfect liberty, should apply alike to every human being. Who can assert this prerogative of laying a heavier burden upon one human being than another, without being authorized to

do so by their common Creator? Who can doubt that if you put such power into the hands of the best men it will be abused, unless restrained by equal laws? Why should one man be more responsible to his temporal or eternal governor than another, and be punished by different rules?

I know that when our fathers came to frame the Constitution, slavery having increased, they were obliged to postpone some of those universal principles, and allow individuals and municipalities to violate them for a while. I thank God that necessity no longer exists. The law-givers of America are now as free to act as Sampson when the fire had touched the flax. May they never again be beguiled by any conservative Delilah to suffer their locks to be shorn and their limbs to be bound by the withes of a twisted Constitution.

The laws which were then intended to be universal must now be made universal. The principles which were intended to govern the whole American nationality, must now be made to cover and control the whole national action throughout this grand empire. Towns, corporations, and municipalities may be allowed their separate organizations not inconsistent therewith, but must not incorporate any principles in conflict with those great rights, privileges, and immunities. What are those rights, privileges, and immunities? Without excluding others, three are specifically enumerated—life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. These are universal and inalienable. It follows that everything necessary for their establishment and defence is within those rights. You grant a lot or easement in the midst of your estate; you thereby grant the right of way to it by ingress and egress. Disarm a community, and you rob them of the means of defending life. Take away their weapons of defence, and you take away the inalienable right of defending liberty.

This brings us directly to the argument by which we prove that the elective franchise is a right of the Declaration and not merely a privilege, and is one of the rights and immunities pronounced by that instrument to be "inalienable."

If, as our fathers declared, "all just government is derived from the assent of the governed;" if in federal republics that assent can be ascertained and established only through the ballot, it follows that to take away that means of action is to take away from the citizen his great weapon of defense and reduce him to helpless bondage. It deprives him of an inalienable right. This clearly proves that the elective franchise ranks with "life" and "liberty" in its sacred, inalienable character. But, while the Declaration clearly proves what the intention then was, the action of the Convention in framing the Constitution of the United States, it seemed to me, bartered away for the time being some of those inalienable rights, and, instigated by the hellish institution of slavery, suspended one of the muniments of liberty.

Having thus shown that the elective franchise is one of the inalienable rights of man, without which his liberty cannot be defended, and that it was suspended by the arbitrary Constitution of 1789, let us see if that suspension has been removed, so as to leave our hands unrestrained in restoring its full vigor while still acting under the Constitution. That right appertains to every citizen; but while this suspension existed, the natural love of despotism induced communities to hold that each State might fix the qualifications, rights and deprivations of its own citizens.

The fourteenth amendment, now so happily adopted, settles the whole question and places every American citizen on a perfect equality so far as merely national rights and questions are concerned. It declares that—

"All persons born or naturalized in the United States and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges and immunities of citizens of the United States, nor shall any person be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws."

If by the amended Constitution every American citizen is entitled to equal privileges with every other American citizen, and if every American citizen in any of the States should be found equally entitled to impartial and universal suffrage with every other American in any State, then it follows, as an inevitable conclusion, that suffrage throughout this nation is impartial and universal, so far as every human being, without regard to race or color, shall be found concerned, and so far as it effects the whole nation.

Can he who swears to support the Constitution in all its parts refuse to aid in carrying this into effect, without clear, direct perjury—a worse perjury than would have been committed by those who, under the old Constitution, could not agree to that construction, and thus refused their aid to their fellow-men? What a grand compulsion have these despots, rebels, and murderers finally forced upon the American Republic by their impatient, rash, and bloody acts! How they have aided the just men of the nation in producing this great good! It were well if they could claim some merit as a compensation for so great

a crime. But, if evil must come into the world, "woe unto him through whom it cometh;" though I fear that if good do come into the world through compulsion, no merit will be attributed to the unwilling actors. Let no man, then, who belongs to this great Government, now dare to stand up in the face of high Heaven and longer deny to God's immortal beings the high, the inalienable, the God-granted rights which his immortal Father gave them. Let no one in the past, present, or any future age, attempt to palliate such offence either before an earthly tribunal which is to decide between God's creatures, or at the bar of a higher tribunal, venture to insult Divine justice by longer pleading his inability to execute that justice. We must remember that most of us are separated from the dread tribunal occupied by a Judge who cannot be deceived, by the narrowest isthmus that ever divided time from eternity. If every citizen of any State is entitled to all the inalienable rights, privileges, and immunities of this Government, and if one of those inalienable rights is the right to cast the ballot for every man who is to take part in the Government, show me the man who is so impudent as to deny that suffrage by the ballot is due to every being within this realm to whom God has given immortality. He must be an impudent citizen, and ought never to profess to believe in the existence of a Deity; for that a world could be created and governed without an overruling cause is more feasible than such a proposition.

What would be the effect of conferring this just right upon every citizen in this Republic, according to the original intention of our fathers?

If ever there was a spot on earth where it could be tried with perfect success, and bestow perfect happiness upon all those who are their own rulers and their own subjects, that spot is the continent of North America. In less than ten years it will contain a sound population of more than fifty million people, girt round by deep and broad waters, which no force could cross without our consent. The sea-girt isle of Great Britain, which was said to be thus set off from the rest of the world, was not half so secure by her water-defences as this continent.

That would be a tall and a bold admiral who hereafter, with hostile intent, should venture this side of the pillars of Hercules. Before any monarchical nation shall again attempt to erect its institutions on this side of the Isthmus of Darien, they will find that there exists a Republic, composed of the islands of the sea, more powerful than the European portion of Great Britain, not less powerful than was the Achæan League—which Republic we shall not blush to call an ally because a meridian sun and the tyrant's lash have planted in their color and into their souls the deep and inextinguishable principles of abhorrence to human bondage. A people—now but little understood, but in a few years of progress with their own institutions really free, instead of being ground by the nominal freedom, but real despotism, of Jamaica—will have made as long and rapid strides in the cause of civilization as our southern States are now making. The seed of such an empire is already planted and is germinating. It may not be known to all that the Danish possessions of St. Thomas, Santa Cruz and St. John's are sustained by republican institutions, though all of the legislators and most of the executive officers chosen by themselves are colored. They have free schools, and can, with scarcely the exception of a single individual of the proper age, read and write, and have all the essential requisites of a free republic, except, perhaps, the appointment of a few of the executive officers by the home Government, when the wishes of the people are always consulted.

Let a tyrant attempt to put his foot upon such a bombshell and he will be blown, with all around him, to inevitable ruin. Before the time supposed for such action shall have arrived, Cuba, the most fertile and productive spot of its size except, perhaps, the Delta of the Nile, will have become saturated and ripe with the bursting principles of freedom, and, together with St. Domingo, Hayti, Jamaica, and their cognate races, will be ready to leap to arms and defend their appropriate dominions, if such aid be needed in the cause of freedom, and if they shall not, then can be added to our dominion by our enterprising Foreign Secretary. All of these islands are now free, except Cuba and Porto Rica which are now oppressed by the proudest and most cruel tyrant of Europe, himself of a mixed race of swarthy Moors and sluggish white blood. He may as well take warning that the day is very near when he must knock the shackles from every Cuban, or have them torn from them by the spirit of liberty. She is within sight of emancipated America, and surrounded by islands of the sea, every one of which is free. The sounds of the overseers' lash and the cries of the agonized slave will not, must not, be longer permitted to mingle with the sweet pæans to liberty, which are shouted forth through every freeman's voice in the western world. All the golden rivers of Africa will never again purchase sufficient power to re-enslave those just made free by the spirit of liberty, much stronger than all the powers of Hercules or of Sampson.

Before any other nations are prepared to establish their institutions in any part of this

western world, the broad, bold shoulders and swarthy frames of the inhabitants of this island empire will have established Governments that Spain and other European nations will willingly surrender to freedom, lest they should corrupt their despotic league and hasten their own Governments a half century along the railroad path of liberty. But whether such an ally shall then exist or not, without boasting, this Government, counting upon her position and power, can entertain no fear of all the world beside. Traverse her twenty thousand miles, from the Russian possessions around the Isthmus of Darien, up the Gulf stream to the bold shores of the Granite State, which, with the islands of the Gulf, soon, I hope and believe, will be added to the mighty nation to which they naturally belong; thence up to where the Esquimaux roam, and where we have lately employed the protection of the mighty walrus, on the strait which no hostile foot will ever attempt to tread, around to where the herring, the codfish, and the whale are seeking to find a permanent refuge—but no time which the eye of man shall ever see or his imagination depict can ever screen them from the hearty enterprise of this mighty empire—and you have such a vast, impregnable, and sea-girt domain as the world never saw.

If anything more were wanting, more iron-clads than all Europe could send to this distance could be brought into active operation in any time necessary for the defense of the nation.

Then take your route northward and inland, from the southern isthmus, and you cross every latitude necessary for the production of all the industrial products of civilization. No mineral, no vegetable, that ever God created for the wealth, comfort, or ornament of man is wanting. Her southern climate, never more to be polluted by the unholy and infamous institution of slave labor, upon every breeze the balmy odors that delight the senses. Its soil is filled with the precious metals, its rivers run sands of gold, while its more rugged parts bear quartz equal to the fabled Ophir, and lodes of silver. If its more northern climate is held in firm and healthy by the hardy sons of "Greenland's Icy Mountains," its moss-clad granite will always be protected by the goddess of liberty:—How much better than the delicious isle over which the soft breezes of spicy Ceylon, continually blow

"Thought
Only

prospect pleases,
vile."

The ingenious artist of the coast surveys and geographical delineations upon his invincible shield, never depicted a land so glorious and so variegated with gold and silver and every precious metal, and so bewitching to the senses with the odors of God's happiest creations. Its enchanting products grow in abundance on every inch of her variegated soil; and, since the curse of slavery is removed, if we do the justice which the Declaration of Independence proposes, and we now propose—this land will soon contain a greater abundance of riches than either Europe, Asia, or Africa.

I now desire to indicate an amendment which I propose to offer in order. I understand that this bill is not now in a condition to be amended.

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